



Drug Abuse and Preventable Poisonings from Medicines in the Home

Teen Drug Abuse

The home medicine cabinet provides teens with easy access to drugs and many teens mistakenly think medicines are safer to abuse than illegal drugs.

An alarming number of teens abuse medicines - over 20% of high school students have taken medicine for non-medical reasons.

Over 70% of those who abused prescription pain relievers said they got them from a friend or relative, often without their knowledge.

Prescription Opioid Overdose

In 2010, 209 people in King County died from an overdose of prescription opiates or sedatives. That's equivalent to a crash of a full Boeing 737.

Drug overdoses have surpassed car crashes as the leading cause of preventable deaths in Washington - the majority of these overdoses involved prescription opiates.

767 residents in King County were admitted for drug treatment for prescription opiates and sedatives as the primary drug at treatment admission in 2011.

Children are at High Risk of Preventable Poisoning

Over half of the 37,000 calls to the Washington Poison Center in 2009 were for young children poisoned by medicines found at home.

32% of child poisoning deaths in Washington were caused by someone else's prescription medicines and 26% were caused by over-the-counter medicines.



Pharmaceuticals in our Environment

Each year roughly 30% of medicines - or about 33 million containers - are left unused in Washington State. Medicines are potent chemicals and most are designated as dangerous or hazardous waste when leftover or expired.

Flushing medicines or throwing them in the trash contributes to pollution in Puget Sound. Flushing unneeded medicines down the toilet or sink sends these toxic chemicals out into our waterways or Puget Sound because modern wastewater treatment facilities cannot remove pharmaceuticals.

Throwing medicines in the garbage is not safe - especially for controlled substances like narcotics and other highly addictive and dangerous drugs - because the drugs can be found and used by others, even if they are mixed with undesirable materials like coffee grounds or kitty litter. Landfills for household garbage are not designed to store and treat hazardous chemicals. The county's Cedar Hills facility pumps landfill leachate to wastewater treatment facilities, which is another route by which pharmaceuticals enter Puget Sound.

With thousands of different medicines entering our environment, even at low levels, impacts on aquatic species and potential contamination of our drinking water supplies is a concern. Researchers have observed negative changes in aquatic species and a range of medicines show up in the tissues of fish which are part of our food chain.

Protecting our environment and our families by using a medicine take-back program to dispose of unwanted household medicines is the safe and secure way to reduce the amount of medicines entering the environment.





Medicine Take-Back Programs

The secure and environmentally sound way to dispose of leftover and expired medicines.

In Washington State, secure medicine drop-off programs are operated by some pharmacies, a limited number of law enforcement offices, and some local governments. Over 135,000 pounds of unwanted medicines have been collected statewide for proper disposal, confirming residents will use medicine take-back programs.

Pharmacy programs - accept all over-the-counter medicines and prescription medicines, except those that are controlled substances, like narcotics and stimulants.

Law enforcement programs - accept all medicines, including controlled substances; some only accept prescription medicines.

Medicine Take-back in King County -

Group Health offers medicine take-back at 12 clinical pharmacies and Bartell Drugs is able to offer medicine take-back at 12 of its 43 retail pharmacies. Currently nine city police stations maintain ongoing collection sites.

See details on locations at
www.TakeBackYourMeds.org
 or call 206-296-4692

Existing medicine take-back programs in King County are voluntary, temporary and are not comprehensive or widely promoted due to limited funding.

Current federal regulations allow only law enforcement to collect medicines that are controlled substances. The DEA is writing new regulations to allow additional collection options. While working on rule-making, the DEA has coordinated semi-annual National Prescription Drug Take-Back Days, which rely on local law enforcement participation and resources. The DEA plans to stop coordinating these take-back days once the new regulations for collection of controlled drugs are finalized, anticipated in late 2012/early 2013.



Medicine Take-Back - Dispose of Unwanted Medicines Safely and Securely in King County

Protect your kids and keep your family safe by storing your medicines securely at home. When medicines are expired or unwanted, use a medicine take-back program – it's the safest way to dispose of unused medicines.

Produced by



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